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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 001883

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: JOURNALISTIC LICENSE, POLITICAL AMBITIONS BEHIND
LATEST CYPRUS SCANDAL

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Nicosia awoke October 22 to "news" the Turkish Army twenty years ago employed Greek Cypriot (G/C) and Greek detainees as "guinea pigs" at weapons production facilities outside Ankara. According to preliminary accounts in leading daily "Philelefteros," the alleged victims, prisoners since the 1974 hostilities on the island, had suffered an unknown fate. Central to the allegations was a recent article in an obscure Washington think-tank's monthly journal. Despite the author's profound caveat -- "such references (to the guinea pigs) have not been confirmed or verified" -- the story snowballed, prompting prominent RoC officials to Turkey-bash and demand a full reckoning. Groups representing the Cypriot missing persons mobilized, and our closest contacts sought Embassy confirmation of the think-tank's bona fides. Within days, however, large holes in the account became evident. Turkey predictably dismissed the report out of hand. Opposition media questioned the objectivity of both the researcher and the Washington-based G/C journalist who broke the story here. And rumors surfaced that both men had acted under Tassos Papadopoulos's orders, the RoC president masterminding the scandal to tarnish Ankara's image and EU accession chances. "Philelefteros" has begun to backpedal under the public cross-examination, defending tooth-and-nail its decision to publish sketchy allegations. Even the Foreign Ministry, usually precise in its arguments, could only blast past Turkish noncooperation on missing persons, a sign that it, too, had doubts. Colleagues in Ankara and elsewhere can judge whether the think-tank's allegations merit further review. From our side, the scandal illustrates the poor performance, shameless bias, and "for sale" nature of most Cypriot journalists on both sides of the island. END SUMMARY.

MIAs Still Front Page News

¶2. (U) Some 1500 Greek Cypriots and 500 Turkish Cypriots went missing between the 1963 outbreak of inter-communal violence and the Turkish military intervention in July/August 1974. Relatives' organizations wield considerable clout here, while the fate of the missing has long figured high in negotiations for a Cyprus settlement. Gravesite discoveries, even promising leads, generate significant media coverage on both sides of the island.

¶3. (SBU) In this environment, "Philelefteros's" October 22 front-page story spawned immediate buzz. "The Missing --

Turkey's Guinea Pigs" read the headline drafted by Washington correspondent (and regular thorn-in-our-side) Michael Ignatiou. At the top, Ignatiou identified his primary source document, an article in the September 2006 "Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy" (DFASP) journal. Its author, whom the G/C journalist did not name, argued in DFASP that Turkey had developed chemical and biological weapons for use against PKK rebels. Buried amidst accounts of the weapons' employment in southeast Turkey lay the following supposed revelation: "There were many references -- denounced mostly by Kurds but also Turks -- that, during 1984-88, many missing G/C and Greek soldiers captured in 1974 ended up in the secret biochemical labs of the Turkish Army and were used as guinea pigs. However, such references have not been confirmed or verified." The DFASP piece also alleged that Turkish secret police operating clandestinely in Cyprus in 1994 had assassinated a G/C journalist aware of the secret labs and their ethnic Greek lab rats.

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14. (U) RoC reactions were swift. Papadopoulos offered measured comments, promising that administration officials would study carefully the allegations. Foreign Minister George Lillikas leaned further forward, calling the DFASP report "a shock, a human tragedy, especially for the victims' families." Sensing perhaps that Lillikas had leant too much credibility to the "unverified, unconfirmed" report, Government Spokesman Christodoulos Pashiardis backtracked, emphasizing that, while the RoC took seriously the allegations, it was in no position to verify them.

15. (C) Contacts sought the Embassy's opinion on DFASP and the veracity of its report. UN Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) DCM Wlodek Cibor telephoned PolChief October 23, concerned the

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allegations -- and the possible RoC response -- conceivably could hinder operations of the UN Committee on Missing Persons (CMP), the UN's most successful bi-communal operation. UN Special Representative Michael Moller shared his worries, Cibor added. In a working lunch with PolChief the following day, Greek Embassy First Secretary Costas Kollias opined that DFASP's "evidence" looked scant. As in Cyprus, however, the missing persons issue in Greece was quite sensitive, and the relatives of the 80-odd Greek nationals who disappeared in 1974 would demand government action. GoG investigative efforts were centered in Washington, Kollias added, with the Greek Embassy there canvassing its State, DoD, and think-tank contacts.

Backtracking Begins

16. (U) Additional details on DFASP emerged in the media on October 25. Media reported the think-tank was the brainchild of Gregory Copley, an Australian-born, Washington-resident "defense and foreign policy expert." "Philelefteros" published excerpts of Copley's CV, emphasizing the researcher enjoyed great influence within Pentagon walls. The pro-government daily continued its attack on Ankara's alleged culpability and unwillingness to tackle the missing persons issue in good faith.

17. (SBU) Opposition-affiliated media took a different tack, however. Acquiring the source report from DFASP's journal, they attacked the hearsay that peppered the text. English-language daily "Cyprus Mail" called Copley "an American nutcase conspiracy theorist who runs a US-joke of an organization...that nobody with half a brain would take seriously." "Politis" and "Alithia" questioned why Philelefteros chose to publicize the inflammatory, unconfirmed accounts of G/C and Greek "guinea pigs," surmising that pressure from the Papadopoulos administration lay behind the ethically questionable decision. Gregory

Copley was a hired gun, they continued. Websites of both the Cyprus Embassy in Washington and the American Hellenic Institute -- which rarely miss an opportunity to bash Turkey -- contained links to Copley-authored texts, the papers added.

18. (C) Media buried deeply Turkey's response to Copley's revelations, or ignored it completely. "Greek Cypriots themselves don't believe this nonsense," asserted Levent Eler, political counselor at Turkey's "embassy" to the "TRNC." The Philelefteros story appeared a clumsy attempt to besmirch his country's reputation in the run-up to the December European Council meeting, where Turkey's EU accession course would be debated. Eler was reporting on the scandal, he told PolChief October 31, but his superiors in Ankara seemed completely disinterested. On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriot CMP member had issued a statement declaring Copley's accounts works of fiction. Turkey's "full support" of CMP activities would continue, Eler finished.

19. (C) On account of FM Lillikas's pledge to investigate and of DFASP's U.S. address, we expected the Foreign Ministry to request consultations. The call never came. Curious, we followed up with Second Secretary Christina Tzika, who tracks human rights issues at the MFA. Tzika October 31 revealed her ministry had obtained no verification of Copley's claims. Nor had expected pressure for action from missing persons groups materialized. Despite her near-admission that DFASP's account appeared baseless, Tzika criticized Turkey's overall handling of the prisoner issue. Ankara, she argued, had delegated all responsibilities to the CMP, an institution tasked only with identifying gravesites and exhuming corpses on the island. Other reports -- "confirmed," she claimed -- proved Turkey was holding G/C and Greek prisoners of war as late as the mid-1980s. Turkey most open its files, Tzika ended.

And Attack Yields to Defend

10. (SBU) With public opinion seeming to turn against "Philelefteros," journalist Ignatiou assumed the defense. In a prominently placed October 30 article, he offered a

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seven-point justification for breaking the DFASP story. Copley, Ignatiou explained, had great Pentagon support (but none at Foggy Bottom), towed the Administration's counter-terrorism line without fault, and once worked for Caspar Weinberger. U.S. Embassy websites featured links to his works, and prominent North American universities promoted them, as did the National Defense University. Finally, the Justice Department "supported" his reporting on the Muslim world. The journalist pressed the Send button only after Copley had "insisted" he had numerous Turkish Army sources who had corroborated the story. Nowhere did Ignatiou mention personal efforts to inspect evidence or confirm witness accounts, however.

11. (U) Copley, too, saw the need to clear his name. In a "press advisory" transmitted to major Cypriot media October 31, the think-tanker, under the byline "President of International Strategic Studies Association (ISSA)," struck back at "Politis" and "Cyprus Mail." Their attacks, Copley stressed, "were designed to embarrass the elected Government of Cyprus...while supporting the interests of the Turkish Government." ISSA stood behind its story, but revealing sources' names and positions, as critics were demanding, could threaten their well-being. The organization reserved the right "to respond more substantially, legally, against 'Politis'."

Comment:

¶12. (C) Four hundred miles separate Nicosia from the "secret biochem weapons facilities" of suburban Ankara; we therefore are in no position to comment on the substance of Copley's allegations. Similarly, we cannot verify his claims that ISSA "directly employs 200 field collectors and intelligence analysts to service clients in 246 countries and territories" (a figure that exceeds the UN's roll, "Politis" chuckled.) Yet the editors among us can differentiate well-researched texts from conjecture and hearsay. Copley's unverified and unconfirmed account falls neatly into the latter category. From there, it's no great leap to accept opposition media claims that the RoC itself had fomented the scandal. Alexandra Attilidou (protect), a reliable Embassy contact at Intercollege, the Nicosia institution where Copley has spoken, lent credence to "Politis's" counter-accusations October 29. Not only had the Presidency commissioned the Turk-bashing story, she contended, but it directed Ignatiou to break it just two weeks before the European Commission issues its accession process report card. Papadopoulos had hoped to cement public support for hard-line anti-Ankara tactics, the reasoning went.

¶13. (C) If Attilidou's allegations prove true, Ignatiou likely played the willing co-conspirator, since numerous and varied Embassy interlocutors declare he is in the President's pocket. While the journalist's actions did not directly compromise U.S. interests on this occasion, more often than not he causes us problems. Criticizing our Cyprus policy is no crime, of course (it's more the national sport here, actually.) But "Philelefteros's" star snoop uses the access we grant him against us. Cutting Ignatiou off completely would backfire, but we ought consider weaning him soon. End Comment.
SCHLICHER